



DELHI UNIVERSITY
LIBRARY

DELHI UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

Cl. No. 0:2 NDE1:1 H7,3

Ac. No. 378441 Date of release for loan

This book should be returned on or before the date last stamped below. An overdue charge of 5 Paise will be collected for each day the book is kept overtime.

TWO ABSCONDERS

A Short Play

Based on the Open Rebellion of '42

By

N. R. Deobhankar

With a Foreword by

Aruna Asaf Ali

"Freedom's battle once begun,
Bequeath'd from bleeding sire to son
Though baffled oft, is ever won."

The Vidya Mandir Limited

NEW DELHI.

Published by
The Vidya Mandir Limited,
CONNAUGHT CIRCUS.
NEW DELHI.

All Rights, including those of translating screening
and staging are reserved by the Publishers
and are fully protected

1st. Edition 1947

Printed at
The Gondals Press, New Delhi.

To
A. A. A.
A. P.
J. P.
and
R. M. L.

The Four "Absconders"
Who Have Secured A Place
In The Sun.

Foreword

Story telling is a difficult art. Dr. Deobhankar has practised it with skill. Many will expect in the 'Two Absconders' a tale of Nineteen Forty Two. The author's politics, however, have not superseded his interest in human emotions. This is fortunate. The rainbow is perennially fascinating because it has more than one colour. When literature does not reflect this quality it ceases to be art. This story cannot fail to hold one's interest. Dr. Deobhankar's friends and colleagues will find in his literary output a new facet to a personality mellow with purpose.

Delhi.
26-10-45.

Aruna Asaf Ali.

Author's Note

The Characters and locations in the Play are imaginary and the situations fictitious. But it is claimed that the conditions portrayed bear a close resemblance to facts.

Ahmednagar
December, 1943

N. R. D.

CHARACTERS

MISRA : *Deputy Superintendent of Police.*

PALTU KHAN : *Chief Inspector of Police.*

HOGG : *Superintendent of Police.*

USHA : MISRA'S *daughter.*

SHAMBU DAYAL : *I.C.S. Magistrate & Collector.*

GUMAN SINGH : *Kotwal.*

DULARI : GUMAN SINGH'S *Mistress.*

MAHESH PRASAD : *Political Absconder.*

HAMID : *Assistant D. S. P.*

BINO : *Maid servant to USHA.*

Clerk, Orderly, Bearer, Constable, Sub-Inspector

*Action takes place on two successive days
of March 1943, somewhere in U. P.*

Act 1.

CHARACTERS :

MISRA : *Deputy Superintendent of Police. A small unimpressive man of 50, turned grey, wearing a tooth-brush moustache and gold rimmed glasses. A Government servant of the "educated" brand, who has risen high more through plodding and pliancy, than initiative or force of character. Prolonged servitude and a focus on personal advancement has dwarfed his outlook and dulled his moral sense. While rushing to the rescue of a village woman his son was shot dead by a Tommy.*

PALTU KHAN : *Chief Inspector of Police, subordinate to MISRA and recruited by "selection". A bulky, ferocious looking man of 45, sporting an upturned moustache ; devoid of refinement or scruples ; seasoned in cruelty and corruption. He carries himself with impudent swagger before all, except the white officials, to whom he is*

blatantly obsequious. A man with an aggressive personality and a slave to excessive indulgence.

HOGG: *Superintendent of Police, the boss of the whole Division. He is a big-boned, beefy Englishman, this side of 50, who has little of intellect and less of culture, but, in his British arrogance, is blissfully ignorant of both shortcomings. The joys and sorrows of the people among whom and on whom he lives mean nothing to him. He is intolerant of the mildest criticism and laps up the crudest sycophancy with disgusting avidity. The recent birth of a fearless nationalism enrages him. He is bewildered at the present collapse of the "Law & Order" methods and puts it all down to oriental ingratitude and native duplicity.*

SCENE :

Police Head Quarters, somewhere in U. P. Office of the Deputy Superintendent MISRA. It is 3-30 p.m. of a day in March 1943. MISRA is at his table, working his way through files and trays of papers in front of him. There is a telephone at the right hand end and some racks and almiras in the back ground, with sports and marksmanship trophies displayed on the top. There are a few group photographs on the wall, of

official celebrations. The Head Clerk is presenting papers for to-day's disposals.

N.B.—*The Military etiquette of saluting, standing at attention, turning on heels, etc. should be observed at all relevant occasions in Act 1 and Act 3.*

HEAD CLERK: This is the last file for today, Huzur.

MISRA: So much the better. What's it about?

HEAD CLERK: It's the Kalipur report. The place is quiet now.

MISRA: How many arrests? Have they got the ring leaders?

HEAD CLERK: No, Huzur. The rascals got scent and decamped. The remaining eleven are now in custody.

MISRA: Let the file be here. I'll go into it later. Where are the Collective Fine papers? I mean about Nazimpur.

HEAD CLERK: Here they are, Huzur.

MISRA: Thank you. That's all for you. Will you send in Chief Inspector PALTU KHAN?

Ah, here he is, (*Enter PALTU KHAN. Exit*

HEAD CLERK.) Well, Khan Sahab, what's

your information about Nazimpur? The Superintendent said he had a talk with you about it.

PALTU KHAN: It was nothing particular, sir. I happened to be there and replied to Saheb Bahadur's questions to the best of my knowledge.

MISRA: That's all right. I don't mind your telling the S. P. anything. After all, he is the boss. But it will avoid confusion if you pass on the information to me also.

PALTU KHAN: Of course, sir. Certainly, sir. There comes the Saheb Bahadur himself. *(Enter Hogg in a golf suit, smoking a cigar. MISRA and PALTU KHAN rise dutifully. HOGG nods casually and throws himself into a chair. The two subordinates attend to him, standing.)*

HOGG: Good, you are both here. Where's the Astt. D.S.P.?

MISRA: Mr. HAMID is out on a kidnapping investigation, sir.

HOGG: Then you had better do it yourself, MISRA. I want you to write and tell the Commissioner that it's all a mistake about

the Nazimpur fine. The Muslims will have to be exempted, as in other cases. They have nothing to do with the trouble, you see.

MISRA : Yes, sir. . . . Begging your pardon, sir, the report of the Circle Inspector . . .

HOGG : Yes, yes, I know all about that. Chief Inspector PALTU KHAN says the Circle Inspector is a Hindu. So that explains it. It must be a trumped up case.

MISRA : Yes sir.....Begging your pardon, sir, the P.W.D. Overseer, who happened to be on the spot is a Muslim, sir.

HOGG : Quite possible. I have known such things to happen. Even a P.W.D. Overseer can be a Muslim. There's no law against it, is there ? What do I do about it ? Convert him to your enlightened faith ?

MISRA : Begging your pardon, sir, he also supports the Circle Inspector's allegations against the Muslims. What is to be—to be done about his report, sir ?

HOGG : File it, my dear man, file it. You are getting duller everyday, MISRA. This won't do. You must buck up. You've already disgraced the Police Force by lett-

ing your son get mixed up in a subversive clash with the military. Most objectionable
... Most objectionable.

MISRA : He has paid with his life for it, sir.

HOGG : Of course he has. Do you then expect us to engrave his name on the Police Roll of Honour? The Law is no respecter of persons, at least not the Law *we* have introduced in this chaotic country, don't you see?

MISRA : Yes sir.

HOGG : Perhaps you would prefer your old chaos to our present order, eh? So that you could again be the cock of the roost, just because you are a wily Brahmin. You *are* a Brahmin, aren't you, MISRA?

MISRA : Yes, sir. Begging your pardon, sir, it was the Kshatriyas, or the Turks, or the Afghans who were the cocks in those days, sir. Rarely the Brahmins.

HOGG : Is that so? I thought Tippu Saheb was a Brahmin. Or am I mixing him up with Granth Saheb?

PALTU KHAN : The Granth Saheb is the Holy Book of the Sikhs, Huzur. Huzur has

probably Nana Saheb in his mind. He was a Brahmin. Nana Saheb, the Monster of Cawnpore.

HOGG : Ah, that's the rascal I meant. I never was keen on your Indian history, nor any d-m history, for that matter. I'm no B.A. like MISRA. Are you a B.A., PALTU KHAN?

PALTU KHAN : No, Huzur.

HOGG : I thought not. Not even a "Failed" one, eh? Thank the Lord. If I had my way I would close down these infernal universities, the whole lot of them—and auction them off, lock, stock and barrel. D-m hot beds of sedition and anarchy. Look at all the havoc by those young swines every where. But they will all get what's coming. You wait and see, wait and see. We'll soon provide excellent company for your late son and heir, MISRA. In the nether world, Ha ! ha ! ha !

PALTU KHAN : There's that captured absconder, Huzur, whose interrogation is half over.

HOGG : Which one? There are so many of that lousy breed.

PALTU KHAN : The one who shot Inspector

HARBANS SINGH, Huzur. MAHESH is his name.

HOGG : Isn't this the chap who refused commission in the I. C. S. after passing the competitive ?

MISRA : Yes sir, the same fellow.

HOGG : What did he do it for ? Is he crazy ?
What's there better on earth than the I.C.S.?

MISRA : It's said he wanted to work for *Swaraj*, sir.

HOGG : What ? *Swaraj* ? While we British are alive and kicking ? What d-m impertinence !
What do you say, PALTU KHAN ?

PALTU KHAN : Yes, Huzur. Obviously, Huzur. There was a taste of *Swaraj* in seven provinces for a brief spell, Huzur. The maximum salary, that of the Prime Minister, was a beggarly 500/-. Service for the love of the motherland ! A fine phrase, Huzur !

HOGG : That's Indian all over ! That's a chronic maggot in your brains—this service and sacrifice and all that Utopian bunk. Now take *our* Prime Ministers at home. They are no fools. Besides the decent salary we

pay them, they have private incomes, shares in our ship-yards, in colonial railways, even in enemy munitions. You laugh at us as a nation of shop-keepers and spend your lives polishing the shoes of those very shop-keepers when they come out to rule over you? Isn't that so, MISRA?

MISRA: Yes sir. That's true, sir. About this captured absconder, there's a little difficulty about identifying the revolver found on him, sir. It's bore doesn't match the bullet extracted from the body, sir.

HOGG: Well, what if it doesn't? Change the bullet, or plant the right revolver, or do something, instead of merely adding up difficulties. You really *are* getting tiresome, MISRA. Work is pouring in from all sides and at top speed and here you go holding up a case for a petty detail and creating a jam, like a raw traffic cop.

MISRA: I'm sorry sir, I thought it would.....

HOGG: Never mind what you thought. Go and get it straightened out at once. Do you get me?

MISRA: Yes sir.

HOGG : PALTU KHAN, why don't you look into the thing yourself and put some *jaldi* into it? It's an important case, big enough to make or mar your future. I give you a free hand.

PALTU KHAN : Thank you, Huzur. I obey, Huzur. Huzur has always been gracious. As to this absconder, he is a tough rascal, Huzur, for all his mild looks. He is the brain behind this country-wide uprising, the idol of the young generation, Huzur. Twice escaped from custody, once from jail. Has a net-work of conspirators in all the provinces. A regular devil, Huzur.

HOGG : This d-m country is getting thoroughly Bolshy. It's Russian gold that does it. Rope in as many persons as you can in taking down his statement. The more illustrious the names the better. You get me?

PALTU KHAN : Thoroughly, Huzur. But he is stubborn like hell, Huzur. Doesn't make the right confession, Huzur.

HOGG : Go ahead full steam. No half measures. Spare the rod and spoil the child! Do anything short of killing, and even if he

should kick the bucket, where's the harm ? It will spare the Govt. a tedious prosecution and a shameful expense. All you have to do is to make a report. Say the accused had a fall and broke his neck while trying to escape. If those pampered wind bags, those yelping dogs, the M.L.A's and M. L. C's and all the rest of them make trouble later, I'll see to it. We've got to make an example of these would-be revolutionaries.

PALTU KHAN : Thank you, Huzur. We've also to consider about the reward for capturing this absconder. There are one or two claimants and it might be a good policy to make quick payments. That will encourage our loyal adherents. There are so many scoundrels still at large.

HOGG : Make your recommendations. I'll look into them,—a mere matter of form. What you say will go. The amount is 10,000, I believe. Pretty generous. There were one or two tips I received from— from certain sources that have proved helpful in this arrest. I suppose I'll have to—sort of make suitable acknowledge-

ments. You see what I mean ? A couple of thousands, a mere trifle, really, but..... but that will have to do. The rest will be at our disposal for the other claimants. So you know how we stand and can go ahead (*Enter Orderly*).

ORDERLY : (*saluting*) There's a telephone call for Huzur.

HOGG : Who is it ?

ORDERLY : It's Bull Sab's Memsab, Huzur.

HOGG : (*looking at the watch*) Oh it's nearly 4 already. Say I'm coming. Put the golf clubs in the car. (*Exit orderly*). By the way, MISRA, I may be away for a couple of days from tomorrow. Bull Memsab has fixed a picnic camp and *shikar* party. Up the *Baghnnullah*, the usual spot. The Forest Sab's Assistant will see to the tents, *machans*, beaters and all that. Also the commissariat. Better get into touch with him and see if he wants help.

MISRA : Yes, sir. Certainly sir. Any instructions for work here, sir ?

HOGG : Nothing particular. Carry on. If any trouble crops up take a firm line. Nip it

in the bud. Don't be chicken-hearted in using the lash or lathi, bayonet or bullet. Running this country is child's play—if you only know how. But that's just what you Indians don't. What do you say, PALTU KHAN ?

PALTU KHAN : (*smiling*) Huzur knows us inside out. Not for nothing has Huzur been the virtual Raja of this province for 10 years.

HOGG : (*pleased*) Ha ! ha ! ha ! Raja, eh, ? Raja without the crown. Ha ! ha ! Well, a crown must be a confounded nuisance.....Uneasy lies the head—what ? I'm better off without it. (*Enter orderly*).

ORDERLY : (*saluting*) Telephone call, Huzur, from Bull Sab's Memsab, Huzur.

HOGG : All right, all right. Say I've started. (*Exit orderly*). Well I am off, then. Get on with your jobs, you two. Try and manage things without spoiling my holiday. (HOGG leaves. MISRA and PALTU KHAN escort him to the door, salute and return).

PALTU KHAN : Just see, sir. Is this the time for picnic and *shikar* ? There's a world-war on. Here at home a violent rebellion is spreading

like wild-fire. But our lords must have their dances and dinners, their hunts and holidays.

MISRA : Why do you complain ? They seem to suit you and your community very well. For instance, you know very well the Circle Inspector was only reporting facts about Muslim rioteers.

PALTU KHAN : You mean about the collective fine, sir. Yes, sir. The Muslims *were* the ring leaders in this case. But what can I do, sir ? They pressed 3000/- upon me and left their defence in my hands. Sort of lawyers' honour now. Must protect my clients.

MISRA : How could they afford the amount ?

PALTU KHAN : Better 3 than 15 which the Government would have wrung out of them, don't you see, sir ?

MISRA : But why villify the Circle Inspector, as anti-Muslim ?

PALTU KHAN : Because that's the best defence the white officials will believe, sir.

MISRA : You have a touching faith in white officials. Do you think they will trust

you any more than they trust us, when it comes to a real test?—when it comes to parting with power?

PALTU KHAN: Of-course not, s'r. We are not fools, sir. We may flatter and kow-tow. We may appear short-sighted and servile. But we've no illusions either about the honesty or the efficiency of these upstarts.

MISRA: But you behave as if you have.

PALTU KHAN: Partly it's a defensive reaction, sir. Our communal leaders have filled us with suspicion about yours. And partly it's personal embarrassment. Take me, sir. I'm in a devil of a hole. Debts—enmities—entanglements of all sorts,—may Allah forgive me! I need patronage and get it at a price. It's so with all toadies, whether Muslims or Hindus. They seek favours or have received them already. Once they've sold themselves there is no way out.

MISRA: How the S. P. sneered at Indians! And you smirked and lustily agreed, didn't you?

PALTU KHAN: But you were worse, sir. Had he spoken so heartlessly about my dead son I would have plunged a dagger into his

cursed heart, Saheb or no Saheb.

MISRA : Ah—my son—poor lad ! Better dead than caught alive. If he came to life to-day and was being handed over to you, I would shoot him dead—with my own hands, rather than let him go through what you call interrogation.

PALTU KHAN : And you would be right, sir. Though now I have grown callous, there was a time when Third Degree investigation used to spoil my appetite. That reminds me, sir. I must get on with that inquiry the Saheb Bahadur has just saddled on me.

MISRA : Thank you for relieving me of that ugly task. I have no desire to go into your squabbles over that 10,000/- reward.

PALTU KHAN : Did you hear, sir, of what our Saheb Bahadur called "source of information" for which he claimed two thousand ? In other words, himself. I call this robbery. I call this downright plunder. Two thousand clean gone, without a stroke of work ! And it will all be squandered on wines and nautch girls, typists and silk-stockings. These *Angrez* are regular swines, I tell you, sir.

MISRA : If I were to say this you would squeal on me.

PALTU KHAN : You are unjust to your humble servant, sir.

MISRA : Haven't you done it in the past ?

PALTU KHAN : Who hasn't sinned in the past, sir? But I have given up being a stool-pigeon hereafter. That trick has served its end. There is danger in over-doing it. Any way, there is one tip I want to give you, sir, in all sincerity.

MISRA : You are very kind—and what is that ?

PALTU KHAN : (*drawing near and whispering*)
The Saheb is planning trouble for you, sir. He dropped some remarks and they bode no good. It may be transfer, if not forced retirement.

MISRA : Yes, that's the idea, isn't it ? Hm!—I have heard of it from elsewhere, too. I know something is brewing. That's why he has been nagging at me since—since my son's affair. Well, I must just wait and see. Nothing to be done about it in advance, is there ? Thank you all the same. (*Rising, tidying up papers and preparing to leave.*)

I've to give some instructions to Mr. HAMID and then I'm going home. If anything urgent turns up let me know (*moves towards the door*).

—*Curtain*—

Act II.

NEW CHARACTERS:

USHA: *is MISRA's daughter, 21 year old, intelligent and pretty. She has lost her mother in child-hood. Her brother, a University student, is recently killed by a Tommy. She has passed through the bourgeois mill of accomplishments—college, Shantiniketan, music, dancing and so forth. While her education meant to MISRA nothing more than new styles in sandals and earrings and new ways of wearing the sari and doing the hair he indulged her freely, with an eye to the marriage market. But of late he is getting alarmed. Along with the vanities of adolescence, she has begun to display what to MISRA are pernicious traits. Removed from his influence, the girl has imbibed notions of woman's rights, social equality and national independence, so widely prevalent among those of her age.*

SHAMBU DAYAL: *is a member of the*

I. C. S., Collector and Magistrate of the Division. He is middle-aged, tall, stout, cleanshaven, with a bold look and a coarse mouth and carries himself with assurance. His standing at Simla is high owing to his willingness to be a tool in crushing the freedom movement. Though intelligent and capable, he is a man of strong passions, with no finer feelings to hold him back and with patronage to lend him indemnity. Though he is married and his wife alive, he is infatuated with MISRA'S daughter and spares nothing to buy his consent to marry her.

BINO: *Middle-aged Maid-servant, devoted to USHA.*

SCENE : *Next day, 9 a. m.*

Drawing room in MISRA'S bungalow. There is a sofa at the back of the stage, between two comfortable chairs at right angles to it. MISRA is sitting in the chair to the right of the stage, as you face the audience. There is a teapoy to his right, covered with news-papers. USHA is sitting on the sofa at the end farthest from MISRA and near the radio, which stands at her left, between the sofa and the other chair. There are two doors behind the sofa, on either side of it, leading to the

inner apartments. There are a few paintings on the walls and flower pots in the two windows facing the sofa. USHA'S photo in an ornamental frame, a flower vase and an artistic time-piece stand on the mantle-piece, behind MISRA. Above the mantle-piece is a stuffed head and antlers of a stag presented by some harassed Zamindar. The floor is covered with durries.

MISRA: You know, USHA, I've always pampered you. As you were motherless, that was perhaps natural while you were a child. But somehow I got into the habit and have let you have your way even when you grew up. In this matter of putting off marriage, for instance, haven't I humoured you long enough? But I find you are just abusing my softness. To-day I must be firm. MR. SHAMBU DAYAL would be here in half an hour and I've promised to give him a definite answer.

USHA: Then, father, you can give him a definite "no". You know my decision. I've told you again and again that I won't marry him.

MISRA: What do you mean? Things have indeed come to a strange pass. Daughters defying fathers in the choice of marriage! It's absurd.

It's all due to the freedom I've allowed you. I've been a fool to fall in with this fashion of educating girls. In my younger days there was no girl who wouldn't have gone wild with joy at the prospect of marrying an I. C. S.

USHA : Perhaps they were better men in those days, or the girls were more mercenary.

MISRA : Better men ? What have you against SHAMBU DAYAL ? It's true he is not quite young. And he has a wife whom he does not like. But why should not a man in his position marry again to please himself ? If the wife doesn't object why should you ?

USHA : Do we really need to go into all that again, father ? Don't you know that the man's dissolute life is the talk of the town ?

MISRA : People are fools to talk about matters that don't concern them.

USHA : His character as the bride-groom you propose certainly concerns me. Really, father, how can you think of this match ? He treats his wife abominably, gets drunk, abducts girls. Didn't he miss the gallows by the skin of his teeth over the death of one of his mistresses ? What is it that makes you

even think of such a man ?

MISRA : He may not be perfect, but he is no—
worse than many another. And to be frank,
he is the one man who can get me out of the
trouble NAREN has brought upon me. He can
avert my dismissal. My name has gone into
the C. I. D. black list. That I, of all persons,
should have had such a wild son ! It's fate.
Nothing else but fate.

USHA : What a cruel thing to say, father, when
it was he who was the victim, when it was he
who was murdered in cold blood by a brute !

MISRA : What business had he to go assaulting
a white soldier and get mixed up with village
rebels ? He knew I was in Government
service.

USHA : And you know he didn't assault any-
body. It's common knowledge that he heard
a woman's cry, went to her help and
before he could interfere was shot dead by
the soldier who was molesting her. And
you call him wild ! *ammyam, kiste.*

MISRA : But the soldier was lynched, just
imagine... .. A white soldier battered to
death !

USHA : And served him right. For that was after he had assaulted the woman and murdered my brother. Can you wonder if these atrocities drove the villagers mad with rage?

MISRA : My Superintendent calls it a "^{cowardly} dastardly outrage by a college terrorist."

USHA : Of-course he has to. Else how can he applaud the frightfulness that followed the next day ? *That* was military reprisals ! Huts burnt down.....women stripped naked children bayoneted

MISRA : But why did NAREN play with fire ? Why did he not stay at home when the college was closed down over these disturbances ? Why did he have to go to the village of your maternal uncle, a notorious Congressite ?

USHA : Uncle has always been fond of us. We never missed spending our holidays with him. Being a congressman is not a crime. What Indian doesn't want his country to be free ?

MISRA : Your uncle has been a dangerous influence for both of you and I have been a fool

to allow it. The C. I. D. has got that too against me.

USHA : It's absurd to hold you responsible for your brother-in-law's veiws and activities. He is not your ward.

MISRA : But NAREN was..... What hopes I had built on him ! How I maintained him like a *rais*, spending beyond my means, incurring debts ! I wanted him to taste the high life, to cultivate aristocracy. All went well till he came under your uncle's spell, got into a dangerous set, hobnobbed with fire-brands and came to a violent end. And now they want to sack me for his misdeeds !

USHA : Why are you so easily scared, father ? You are known to your S. P. He has been satisfied with your work all these years. Surely if he has any sense of fairness he will not be so unjust.

MISRA : Justice ! We who have served them all our lives know what to expect. It's all right so long as they have nothing to lose by being fair. But now Hogg wants to find a job for a ne'er-do-well Anglo-Indian to oblige a big planter. So I'm to be kicked out.

USHA : Why should he oblige the planter at your cost ?

MISRA : Because the planter takes Army and Police contracts—because these contracts are gold mines to the contractors as also to the Army and Police bigwigs.

USHA : You mean bribery ?

MISRA : Call it “private commission.” My Superintendent has made a fortune that way. Now the son of this contractor is good for nothing and he can only be made a police officer. But there is no immediate vacancy. So the S. P. invents my seditious connections and secret disloyalty and wants me out of the way.

USHA : Why do Government servants tolerate these things ? Can nothing be done to expose these scandals ?

MISRA : We dare not touch the wheels within wheels. Only a fool will attempt to reform the administration. I only want to save myself and it is here that SHAMBU DAYAL comes in. He has influence and is willing to use it for me.

USHA : Huh !—MR. SHAMBU DAYAL’S influ-

ence ! You know its source. He has mortgaged his soul to the devil. As in private life so as a Magistrate, he is a disgrace to Indians.

MISRA : What have you got against him as a Magistrate ?

USHA : Didn't he let off only the other day a high Military officer who threw an Indian out of a railway carriage ? Didn't he inflict capital punishment on two boys for just cutting telegraph wires ? Didn't he hush up the affair of the policeman who tortured a poor gardener to death because his white employer suspected him of a petty theft ?

MISRA : There is a lot of evil in the world, USHA. One can't scrutinise everything so closely. The wise have to shut their eyes to what they can't help.

USHA : Oh no—not the wise. Only the cowards.

MISRA : It's all very easy to call names. Behind all these decisions of SHAMBU DAYAL there were secret instructions from the highest authority. He could have done nothing to change the course of events. His compliance has strengthened his position.

It has won him favour of those in power.

What would non-compliance have availed ?

USHA : It would have availed a lot. Had he helped the weak who cried out to him for protection and saved the oppressed who cried out for justice, he might have lost the plums of office, but not his soul. But it's you I'm worrying about, father, not him. It hurts awfully to find you, otherwise so pious and conscientious, taking such a servile view of life.

MISRA : You must know struggles and frustrations before you have a right to talk of a view of life, USHA. It's easy to talk of airy-fairy nothings when you live in comfort and plenty upon other's sacrifice. The young are indeed unfeeling and cruel.

USHA : You are unjust, father. The young may be thoughtless at times but neither unfeeling nor cruel. Cruelty comes with callousness. It comes with fear. It's the old who specialise in both.

MISRA : You are only adding discourtesy to disobedience. Do you admit no obligation to me ? Have I no claim upon you as

father ?

USHA : Claim,—yes. But no proprietary right. You can command my services in sickness and age, in poverty and misfortune. And they are yours. But you can't sell me, body and soul. Have I no individual existence of my own ?

MISRA : You talk of my commanding your services. If I'm cashiered tomorrow how will you serve me ?

USHA : I have youth and health. You have given me education. I'm not stupid. Girls less fortunate support themselves and their dependents in honour and decency. Why can't I do the same ? I've led an aimless life too long. Boys and girls around me are stirred by a new consciousness, a new sense of duty to their homes, their country, their age. I too shall shoulder my burden.

MISRA : This is all nonsense,—the latest clap-trap. You must be blind not to see that there is more comfort and security in the marriage I suggest.

USHA : Oh father, I feel sad for you. There will be time enough, when strength fails

and faith dwindles, to forget honour and prefer security.

MISRA : You speak like a new person. This is not the USHA of yesterday.

USHA : The USHA of yesterday died with yesterday. She died when her brother died, victim to a tyrant's lust, a martyr to simple chivalry. To-day I want to uphold something of his vision, something of his sympathy, something of his determination.

MISRA : In short, you will complete the work of my ruin from where he left it. I'm not going to stand any more of this tomfoolery. Gentleness and persuasion are wasted upon you. If you refuse to obey me willingly I shall have to use other methods.

USHA : You mean police methods?

MISRA : You can call them what you like. Remember, you are engaged to Mr. SHAMBU DAYAL from to-day. I shall tell him so when he arrives.

USHA : And I tell you now that I am engaged to no-body,—that I would die an old maid rather than marry that cad.

MISRA : Don't try my patience, I warn you,

USHA. For all your tantrums you will see who is master here.

USHA : It's well that you've dropped the mask of the loving father. It makes it easier for me. I can resist now without regrets. (*Hears the honking of a car*) That's your illustrious visitor, if I'm not mistaken. I shall leave you to his uplifting company.

MISRA : I order you to stay and receive him,
USHA.

USHA : (*laughs*) Better bring out the handcuffs, father. (*Goes out defiantly. Enter bearer.*)

BEARER : Collector Sab, Huzur. (*Enter SHAMBU DAYAL. MISRA rises hastily to greet him*).

SHAMBU DAYAL : Good morning, MISRAJI, good morning. How are you? (*shaking hands cordially*).

MISRA : Good morning, sir. I was just coming to meet you Heard your car.....was expecting this honour. Take this chair, sir. It's more comfortable. (*To bearer*) KALLU, ask BINO to bring tea. (*Exit bearer*).

SHAMBU DAYAL : (*throwing himself in the chair*

with a sigh) Thank you. This is real comfort. Do come nearer.....this end of the sofa. Yes, that's better. Now for a heart to heart chat.

MISRA : Thank you, sir. You are very kind.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Now, MISRAJI, no formality. You mustn't "sir" me and all that, please. This is a friendly visit. You are senior to me and are going to be an elder relation whose feet I shall have to touch... (*laughs*) ha ! ha ! ha !

MISRA : How I'm looking forward to that proud day ! I hope it will dawn soon. But things are not going too well with me, SHAMBU DAYALJI. Fresh obstacles crop up where least expected.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Don't let your Superintendent's scheming worry you, MISRAJI. HOGG may be in charge of law and Order. But it's still the Commissioner who is at the head of administration. We civilians haven't abdicated yet, ha ! ha ! ha ! Mr. BLOOMING is boss even over HOGG and I can handle BLOOMING without difficulty. Since I suppressed that War-Fund extortion

case BLOOMING eats out of my hands. I can make him jump through hoops ! ha ! ha ! ha ! (*Enter the maid-servant with tea-tray, from the door nearest to the mantelpiece and places it on the tea-poy and brings the tea-poy between the guest and the host.*)

MISRA : (*to maid*) Tell USHA to join us, will you ?

MAID : Didi has a bad head-ache, Huzur.

SHAMBU DAYAL : I say.....that's a pity. I'm so disappointed. I hope it's nothing serious.

MISRA : Oh no. Must be a passing indisposition. Or may be, she feels shy.

SHAMBU DAYAL : (*with a leer*) That must be it, ha ! ha ! ha ! Natural, quite natural. Don't let her be bothered, in that case.

(*Exit maid through the same door. MISRA pours out tea. They talk over their cups. After a little while USHA and the MAID appear stealthily behind this door which is partly ajar and listen.*) *Secretly*

MISRA : That's fortunate for me, I mean, about Mr. BLOOMING. Without your support I'm ruined, SHAMBU DAYALJI. But troubles are still pouring in from all sides.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Don't worry about that. Since you agreed to my proposal your cause is mine.

MISRA : Ofcourse I've agreed. No question about that. But hurdles I had not expected are.....

SHAMBU DAYAL : Of course, HOGG practically takes it as settled that his protege will be installed in your place. Spoke of it at the club-dinner. But he is counting without me, ha ! ha ! ha !. I hope you have prepared USHA for an early wedding. The sooner it is over the better, you know. I can't wait long.

MISRA : Ye-s, oh yes. We must get it over quickly. In fact just before you arrived I was giving USHA a bit of my.. I mean I was having a talk with her .. a sort of last ...I mean I too was suggesting an early wedding.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Yes. No point in wasting time. Let it be quick and quiet. Civil registration has that advantage. But of course, I'm not eligible...having a living wife...so it will have to be what you call the

Vedic ceremony. Not that I regret it...far from it. A husband is much better off under Hindu Law...much better off..... Doesn't lose a jot of his freedom...All facilities of a... of an informal connection without its uncertainties and worries, its risks and calumnies ...ha ! ha ! ha !

MISRA : Yes...yes...quite so...quite so...But thethe preliminaries are not quite...I mean not yet over, I'm afraid.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Are you worrying over the fulfilment of my promises ? Are you referring to the Court of Wards lands ? I've kept my word, MISRAJI. Everything went off according to plan. Nearly 50 fertile acres sold to you, assessed as waste land, with a fine old tank thrown in for nothing.....a splendid property. I hope you will live long to enjoy it as the gift of a grateful son-in-law, ha ! ha ! ha !

MISRA : Thank you, thank you, SHAMBU DAYALJI. Thank you very much. I knew you would be as good as your word...Never doubted that. But it's the...it's the girl that now...

SHAMBU DAYAL : Yes—what about her ?

MISRA : Oh, nothing serious...nothing worth noticing...I've to deal with her firmly, that's all. A little more time and there will be an end to all this...er...this...

SHAMBU DAYAL : End to what ? I don't follow you, MISRAJI.

MISRA : End to her nonsense. That's all I mean. You see, SHAMBU DAYALJI the girl is a bit recalcitrant. You remember, I told you before that she was.....I mean I have humoured her too much since her mother's death. So she sometimes forgets what's due to me. Gets sort of petulant. You know what I mean. But ofcourse I'll bring her to her senses.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Do you mean she objects to this match ? I thought you had knocked that nonsense out of her. At least you said you had. Or have you changed your mind yourself...want to back out of it ?... The conscience-stricken father, refusing to sell his child to a depraved suitor...after pocketing the advance ! Is that how the story is to run ?

MISRA : Oh no, SHAMBU DAYALJI—not in the

least. You misjudge me, upon my word, you do. It's not at all that, believe me.

Nothing will give me greater satisfaction than to ..

SHAMBU DAYAL : Let's understand each other, MISRAJI. In accepting your daughter I shall be gaining no distinction. Quite the contrary. Your stock in official circles is very low, as you know too well. I'm sure to come in for odium over this connection. It's true I've taken a fancy to the girl, call it love, or call it infatuation. But there are others who can make me forget her, as I've forgotten those before her. So you need not disguise your meaning if you've changed your mind.

MISRA : You are wrong, SHAMBU DAYALJI,—you do me injustice. Don't I know who profits by this alliance ? Where shall I be without you if the boss throws me out tomorrow ? Do I want enforced pension ? Would I wish to see the fruits of my life snatched away,—as they are sure to be, unless you intervene ?

SHAMBU DAYAL : Then what's your trouble ?

If it's just the girl's wilfulness it's not worth making such a fuss over. I can help you to bring her round. But if it's something else

MISRA : No—no...It's nothing else... absolutely nothing. Upon my word. If you can take her off my hands to-day, I'm willing. I only wished, for your sake as well as mine, to avert a public scene of which she is capable. Of late she has developed, like her brother, strange notions. Talks of rights and wrongs and self-determination and what not.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Don't let that upset you MISRAJI. I'm not one of your effete sentimentalists who expect their brides to approach them shyly, with incense and garlands and to swoon at their feet in ecstasy of devotion. I prefer the primitive style. I like to seize my women and carry them off, as in the cave days, ha ! ha ! ha ! The more she is haughty and the more she resists, the greater the zest in taming a girl,—provided of course, she has a seductive figure and a bewitching eye. Your

daughter satisfies me as to both and I'm all for the chase,—on one condition—you must place yourself entirely in my hands.

MISRA : You can command me, SHAMBU DAYALJI. I shall obey you to the letter. It's true, I'm rather non-plussed. The situation baffles me, not being used to it. But I shall obey you faithfully.

SHAMBU DAYAL : That's good...that's excellent. Now let me see. Yes, this place is rather against us if the girl starts making a scene. That will spoil every thing. Can't you get her away somewhere on some pretext, say on a car trip ? Once a hundred miles beyond the city, you could drive her where you please.....There's my village Phulwari, 60 miles beyond Mirzapur,...but on the main road.

MISRA : I took her once along that very road up to Mirzapur and then 50 miles beyond by the branch road to Bajrang Bagh. Her mother's brother, that seditious lawyer practices there.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Ah, that's fine.....that's splendid. He will make an excellent decoy.

'...Tell her he is very ill... doctors despair...telegram.....she must see him...last wish...no convenient train...a dash by car the only chance. You can work it all out easily.

MISRA : Oh, she will jump at the proposal. It's indeed an excellent idea.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Can You take her away immediately, say this evening ? I shall follow in a separate car and keep in the back-ground until force becomes necessary. Can you start this evening ?

MISRA : I think I can. You see, as the Superintendent is away, I'm free. The office can be told I'm out on investigation. But.....I'm...I mean to say...what's to happen at your village ? I don't quite follow the plan.

SHAMBU DAYAL : What's to happen ? A marriage ceremony—what else ? Once we are tied up nothing can undo the knot. And the girl always makes the best of it in a short time, ha ! ha ! ha !

MISRA : But she...she won't go through the ceremony...in her present mood. I know

her, believe me.

SHAMBU DAYAL : Leave all that to me, MISRAJI.

What's wanted more than the ceremony is evidence for it. I shall see to all that. Don't you worry, MISRAJI. Come with me to my place now. We shall discuss details. I must send a man ahead by car to set the stage at Phulwari. It's a good 160 miles and time is short. Can you come now ?

MISRA : Yes, oh yes. Here I am. Let's go. I want to get this over quickly.

(Exit both. USHA and MAID servant emerge from the inner apartment through the communicating door by which the MAID had previously entered and from behind which both the women had been listening to the plot just hatched.)

USHA : Have the cars crossed the gate ?

MAID : Yes, Didi. Both the Sahebs are in the Collector's car and ours is following behind.

USHA : Oh God ! What villainy ! What treachery !.....And my own father in it !

MAID : You would not believe me, Didi. But every body at the Collector Sab's place knows he wants to get you by hook or

crook. Lucky you heard most of their talk with your own ears. He will stop at nothing, believe me. But our master....

USHA: Ah...my father! God forgive him! Being shocked, however, will not help us. We must do something. We have got to plan escape...Time flies. I must get away—But where? Yes...Uncle...They want to bring him in as a decoy. But he will play a different role if I'm quick. I'll telephone to him...trunk call....divulge the wicked plot and ask him to rush by car.

MAID: Yes, Vakil Saheb is the man to stand up against these tyrants...But will there be time?...150 miles and a possible break down....

USHA: Oh dear, oh dear...And father may want to start within a few hours! Oh, what shall I do?...What shall I do? If only my brother were alive!

MAID: But Didi, if Vakil Saheb can't come all the way here he could at least intercept us at Mirzapur, which we shall have to pass for that wretched Phulwari. And Mirzapur is only 50 miles for Vakil Saheb.

USHA : Yes—that's it. You are right, you are right. I...shall ask him to lie in wait at the Mirzapur Dak Bungalow. I remember it is quite on the crossing. When we arrive there I can get father to stop the car for a while.....pretend to be sick or thirsty and go into the bungalow. You see, he wouldn't know uncle will be there.

MAID : Ah, the tables turned ! It's lucky the monster proposes to follow in a separate car. And Didi, ask Vakil Saheb to bring half a dozen hefty young men with him, properly armed. We have to deal with villains, don't forget.

USHA : You are right. I must not shirk a fight, nor to break off from father for ever, since he abandons all scruples. I'm twenty one and can go where I choose. With all the backing of his high-placed rogues he can't touch me, once I reach uncle's protection. Let me ring him up.
(*As she reaches the telephone and lifts the receiver the curtain falls.*)

—Curtain—

Act III.

NEW CHARACTERS :

GUMAN SINGH : *is the Kotwal. He is a short thickset, powerful man of 40, with black mustaches who, possessing more turbulence than wit in youth, drifted early into police employment, like other village recruits. His strong constitution and daring spirit, added to a few flukes of success, helped his rise to the present post. What was the irrepressible truancy of boy-hood has now developed into greed and licentiousness, due to the depravity of those placed above him. Though convivial among his cronies he is violent when roused.*

DULARI : *is a handsome girl of easy virtue whom GUMAN SINGH has discovered and taken under his protection. She is saucy, self confident and gay. Though attached to GUMAN SINGH, she is jealous and exacting. Her clothes and ornaments display a taste above her circumstances.*

MAHESH PRASAD : *is a tenacious looking man of about 35, above the average height, with a high forehead, bright, wideset eyes, a long thin nose and a sensitive mouth. He is dressed in trousers, tennis shirt, Gandhi cap and Pathan sandals. A close student of systems of government and of production and distribution of wealth, he is an intellectual with a passion for national freedom and social justice. His intensive work amongst the peasants and labourers and his magnetic hold over the young generation make him a dominant factor in Indian politics. The faithful watch-dogs of British Imperialism lose no time in picking him out as their mortal foe and set a price on his head. Personally, he has the simplicity of a peasant, the poise of a stoic, the faith of a fanatic and the loving nature of a sensitive soul. In thus endowing him, Fate has evidently marked him out for a stormy life and perhaps a stormier end.*

SCENE : *The same day. 4 p. m. Police Head Quarters. Chief Inspector PALTU KHAN'S office.*

The writing table is in the centre. Directly behind it is the entrance, on both sides of which,

along the wall, are shelves cluttered with old files, black tin-boxes, pairs of hand-cuffs, cycle lamp, motor tools, hookah, ink and gum bottles, foot-ball trophies, etc. At the left hand corner of the wall, facing the table is the door of the bath room. The rest of the wall is covered with posters and notifications about "wanted" criminals as well as group photographs of Police Officers and men of several generations. In the centre and fixed in the walls are a few rings to which the under-trials are often secured during "investigation". The walls to the right and to the left of the table have two barred windows each. Those on the right side give on the verandah and the big open yard. The blinds of these are not yet pulled down. Those on the left give on a strip of garden and the fencing wall. The blinds of these are down.

INSPECTOR PALTU KHAN *is working at his table, turning over a file. After a minute enters GUMAN SINGH, the Kotwal, and stands at attention.*

PALTU KHAN : *(looking up)* what's it, Kotwal ?

GUMAN SINGH : *BANSI is waiting outside to make his salams to Huzur.*

PALTU KHAN : BANSI ?—Who is BANSI ?

GUMAN SINGH : The same BANSI, Huzur.....

Huzur knows him these three months.

BANSI DHAR who captured MAHESH, the absconder. BANSI, who earned the reward.

PALTU KHAN : (*sarcastic*) Oh, he *has* earned it, has he ? That's excellent. What does he want with me, then ?

GUMAN SINGH : He is a bit worried, Huzur. It's a long time now and there is yet no reply to his application for the reward. He has submitted his diary also. He thought if Huzur would, kindly look into it....

PALTU KHN : Why are *you* so interested ?

GUMAN SINGH : I've told Huzur every thing. Huzur knows it's always done when there is a big game afoot. I've spent a lot of money on this hunt.. financed BANSI from beginning to end . gave valuable clues from the office records.....linked him with informers and friendly police in six provinces. Didn't Huzur congratulate me when MAHESH was finally arrested ?

PALTU KHAN : Did I ? Perhaps I did. I always congratulate people who are too

clever. Tell BANSI he will receive a reply in due course.

GUMAN SINGH : But he is worried, Huzur, because he has heard that FARHID has also put in a claim. And FARHID says Huzur has promised him.

PALTU KHAN : Look here, GUMAN SINGH. Why don't you come to some understanding with FARHID ?

GUMAN SINGH : But the work has all been carried out by me and BANSI, Huzur. It was BANSI who lived in *dharamshalas* and trains, ate rotten food or starved and ultimately saw the bracelets snapped on the absconder.

PALTU KHAN : What amount do you expect, in case BANSI can prove his claim ?

GUMAN SINGH : Why, it was all announced for months every where in open notifications, Huzur. The *Sarkar* has clearly promised 10,000/-

PALTU KHAN : And you expect to get all of it, evidently. You must be mad GUMAN SINGH. Why, 3000/- out of that has already been pocketed by the *Bara Sab*.

GUMAN SINGH : The *Barra Sab* ! The D. S. P?
What for, Huzur ?

PALTU KHAN : As his share, you fool.

GUMAN SINGH : But it's BANSI and I who have
done the job, spent money like water on
informers, ran risk of getting shot.....
Surely the *Barra Sab* will not take the
bread out of a poor man's mouth. He has
a big salary.

PALTU KHAN : It's big to you,—not big to a big
man like him. Your meal costs four annas,
his six rupees. You have one sweetheart
and no wife. He has a wife in *bilyat* and
a sweetheart in every contonement.
Where is the money to come for all this,
my friend ?

GUMAN SINGH : Then is 7000/- all that I get ?
—I mean BANSI gets ?

PALTU KHAN : What about FARHID ?

GUMAN SINGH : Where does FARHID come in,
Huzur ? He has not even crossed this
district. He never...

PALTU KHAN : Since you will not take hints, I
shall be plain. FARHID is only my agent.
Just as the *Barra Sab* has his share, so

must I have mine. Do you get that ?

GUMAN SINGH : Huzur will not be so hard on a poor man.

PALTU KHAN : We've all of us to live.

GUMAN SINGH : How much will it have to be, Huzur ? In the last dacoity Huzur kept all the gold bangles and I barely got a silver *thali* or two.

PALTU KHAN : Next time, you keep the bangles and I will take the *thalis*. Will that do ? Besides, why do you want such a lot of money, GUMAN SINGH ; You spend too much on that frisky woman of yours, if you ask me.

GUMAN SINGH : Women will be women, Huzur. One has to humour them. It's my own money.

PALTU KHAN : Yes, I suppose so. I admire your taste, though. D-m fine girl..... a regular *hourie*, skittish and heartless, like the rest of them, eh ! Why don't you get me one like her ?

GUMAN SINGH : (*laughs sheepishly*) Huzur is only making fun...

PALTU KHAN : I'm not joking. Listen, GUMAN

SINGH. If you can accomodate me in the matter of this girl I shall make it easy for you as to FARHID'S share of the reward. I promise you. Will you say yes?

GUMAN SINGH: I.....I know no other girl, Huzur, at least no one I can suggest just now. But I shall look about, if Huzur is serious.

PALTU KHAN: Of course I mean it. Don't you find this girl of yours—this DULARI, too expensive? I don't mind taking her off your hands, you know. You can pick up some one else.

GUMAN SINGH: (*offended and changing topic*)
Huzur will forgive his servant.....So about BANSI'S claim—to the reward—

PALTU KHAN: Let's first get this settled about DULARI. Really, why don't you part with her and let me look after her my self? I'll make it worth your while, I promise you.

GUMAN SINGH: Huzur knows a Rajput doesn't appreciate joking of this sort. Rajputs are hot headed, Huzur. Huzur must forgive my...

PALTU KHAN: Oh shut up about Rajputs and

hot heads, d-m you—If you are a Rajput I am a Khan. What do you say to that ? I'll stand no d-m impertinence from any bastard,—Rajput, Sikh or Jat. Get me ?

GUMAN SINGH : Huzur may abuse me but must not insult my *khandan*.

PALTU KHAN : To hell with your *khandan* and your pedigree. I'm boss here and shall say what I please. I'll give you cell and conjee if you try being cheeky again. Remember that. Go and get that rascal MAHESH from his cell for interrogation.

GUMAN SINGH : And about BANSI's reward, Huzur.

PALTU KHAN : I don't know any BANSI. FARHID will get that reward. I'll get him to copy BANSI's diary and get every thing passed by the S. P. Go and bring me the absconder. Bring him hand-cuffed.

GUMAN SINGH : Huzur will surely...

PALTU KHAN : Get out, do you hear ?—Right about !

(GUMAN SINGH *salutes and goes. Enter Constable.*)

CONSTABLE : She is in the porch, Huzur.

PALTU KHAN: Who ? What *she* ?

CONSTABLE : DULARI, Huzur.

PALTU KHAN : (*whispers*) Speak low, you idiot !

DULARI here ? You d-m fool ! Go and make sure the Kotwal is not listening at the door. (*Exit Constable. GUMAN SINGH having already heard the Constable, moves away, but listens unseen at the curtained window. Re-enter Constable.*)

CONSTABLE : He has gone, Huzur.

PALTU KHAN: Didn't I ask you to bring DULARI to my bungalow, outside office hours ? Why did you bring her here ? Do you want to get me murdered ?

CONSTABLE : She wouldn't listen, Huzur..... wouldn't agree to come at all. When I threatened she agreed, but only for this place. I thought rather than....

PALTU KHAN : You thought hell ! You will be the death of me...God blast you. Now get her out of this at once. Let her clear out before that swine GUMAN SINGH is back.

(*Enter DULARI, fearless and defiant.*)

CONSTABLE : I had asked you to wait at the

porch. Why did.....

DULARI : You shut up and mind your own business.

PALTU KHAN : (*to Constable with quick decision*)

Wait out-side and tell the orderly I,m busy. He is not to send in any one. If the Kotwal comes with that absconder tell him to....to wait for me in HAMID SAB'S verandah. Do you get that ?

CONSTABLE : Yes, Huzur (*Exit*)

PALTU KHAN : (*pointing to a chair*) Won't you sit down ? I can't let a pretty girl like you stand before me like a felon.

DULARI : I prefer to stand, Inspector Saheb. And my looks are no concern of yours. Why did you send for me ?

PALTU KHAN : I sent for you ?—who said so ? No, I didn't send for you. It was you who wanted to see me, I was told.

DULARI : You lie ! For a whole fortnight that dog of yours has been hanging about my place and bothering me. I had a mind to tell my man GUMAN SINGH straight away. But I wish to keep him out of trouble. He has a quick temper and you have power.

PALTU KHAN : You flatter me, DULARI. What power have I ? Even my courteous invitation has no weight with you.

DULARI : Oh, so you admit you *had* sent for me. Here I am then. Tell me your business.

PALTU KHAN : Believe me, I wish you and GUMAN SINGH well. But the trouble is he is getting mixed up with a gang of counterfeits and smugglers. You know if caught it means ten years of *kala pani*. We are very strict these days. No gold in the country. Paper is all the wealth *Sarkar* has. If *you* start printing notes faster than *Sarkar* where will *Sarkar* be. Don't you see ?

DULARI : I don't believe you. GUMAN SINGH is not that sort. And why don't you warn him if you wish him well ?

PALTU KHAN : Ah, the best of friends, my dear, wields but poor influence, compared to a woman's love. And is there a man alive who can resist you ?

DULARI : But why do you worry so much about GUMAN SINGH ? If he is guilty and doesn't take your warning it is he who will suffer.

PALTU KHAN: Exactly,...and *you* with him, my dear. They always rope in the man's girl. It's a Police formula. And how can I bear the thought of your suffering?

DALARI: Why not? I have nothing to do with you. But I'm sure GUMAN SINGH is not concerned with smuggling and all that. I know him.

PALTU KHAN: My dear girl, you don't know every thing. For instance, do you know that he is running after that girl—what's her name? You know the pretty creature...

DULARI: If you mean GIRJA, that girl is shameless. He doesn't run after her but it's she who waylays him.

PALTU KHAN: May be she does. But he likes being waylaid, from all accounts.

DULARI: I'll slash her nose off if I find her casting sheep's eyes at my man again. She thinks she is an *apsara* from heaven,—the hussy! What if she be of his caste?

PALTU KHAN: You've said it, my dear girl. That's just it, You've hit the nail on the head. Being of his caste he can marry her—don't you see? And,—what's more, he is

going to. He said so to me .. asked for ten days leave, in fact. And then where will you be, my pretty maid ?

DULARI : Oh, don't you worry about me. I'm no man's slave. He was sober and well off. I liked him. I stuck to him. But if he is playing me false after all the promises..., I'm not worrying. A man who was but a constable not long ago is no great catch. I can go to live with the Collector Sab tomorrow, if I care to. His man is all the time pleading for him. (GUMAN SINGH *leaves off eaves-dropping at this stage and goes away.*)

PALTU KHAN : You mean Collector SHAMBU DAYAL ? Are you mad, DULARI ? Don't you know he whipped his last mistress to death in a fit of jealousy ?

DULARI : I thought it was a just a *bazar gup*.

PALTU KHAN : *Bazar gup* ? Our *Barrah Sab* had to hush up the awful truth. No, my dear. You part with GUMAN SINGH and leave the rest to me. I shall set you up like a princess, you will see.

DULARI : That's what you all say till the bird is trapped. You men are all deceivers.

PALTU KHAN: Try me before you condemn me, my dear. Let's talk the matter over more fully and freely,—but somewhere else ...not in the Kotwali. There is no privacy here. A beauty like you is a rare sight and all eyes are turned upon you. And they will be talking all kinds of nonsense if you visit often. It wouldn't be safe. I'll send my man to fetch you tomorrow. Will that suit you ?

DULARI: Why should I come to your bungalow and be stared at by your hen-cooped slave girls ?

PALTU KHAN: Very well. I'll arrange somewhere else. The man will take you to another little place I have. But don't fail me, DULARI. And now clear out of this, my dear,—and keep your mouth shut. (*Exit DULARI. PALTU KHAN walks up and down in deep thought. After a few turns he rings for the Orderly. Enter Orderly.*)

PALTU KHAN: Tell the Kotwal I'm waiting for the man from the lock up. (*Exit orderly. Enter GUMAN SINGH leading MAHESH, the absconder, hand-cuffed and on*

a rope which he ties fast to a ring in the wall.)

PALTU KHAN : What the deuce were you doing all this while ?

GUMAN SINGH : I had to send in tea to an under trial. It took time.

PALTU KHAN : Tea ? Who has bribed you to pamper these revolutionary cut-throats ? Tea for these political swines ?

GUMAN SINGH : Nobody had bribed me. I obeyed your orders.

PALTU KHAN : My orders ? Tea for politicals ?

GUMAN SINGH : I didn't say it was a political.

PALTU KHAN : Who is it then ? Why don't you speak out, blast you !

GUMAN SINGH : I can speak out if I am given time and if I'm not abused for nothing.

PALTU KHAN : Oh, still growling, is it ? Not got over the fit of impertinence yet ? Tea for whom ?

GUMAN SINGH : That soldier.

PALTU KHAN : What soldier ? And say "Huzur" when you answer, d-m you.

GUMAN SINGH : The white soldier, the one who robbed the hotel, Huzur and shot two constables.

PALTU KHAN : Oh, Sjt. Crafty ? Why don't you say so ? Always see that he has enough butter for his toast. *Bara Sab's* instructions. Treat him like a son-in-law. (*Walks up to MAHESH, stands domineeringly, with legs wide apart and hands in pockets.*) Now MAHESH, don't sulk. Answer me fully and quickly. Don't look sleepy.

MAHESH : I *am* sleepy. You've kept me tied to a post, standing upright for two days and three nights now.

PALTU KHAN : Don't lie. We let you sit down part of the day.

MAHESH : Yes, when the only seat within reach of my rope was a block of ice or a tub of water. Would your *Sarkar* dare treat their German prisoners that way ?

PALTU KHAN : But you are not a German. You are only a swine of an Indian,

MAHESH : So are you, if it comes to that.

PALTU KHAN : (*striking him on the face with his palm*) I'll teach you to call me a swine.

MAHESH : Don't behave like one then.

PALTU KHAN : (*striking again*) You *will* be cheeky !

MAHESH : Unloosen me and then you can go at me as much as you like. You wont like it much,—you coward !

PALTU KHAN : (*pointing to the windows on the right*) GUMAN SINGH, pull the blinds down and tie his rope shorter (GUMAN SINGH *does so*) and put him on conjee and water. (*Turns back and sits in his chair behind the table, facing MAHESH.*)

GUMAN SINGH : (*shortning the rope and pulling down the blinds*) He is already on conjee.

PALTU KHAN : Say "On conjee, Huzur," you ox!

GUMAN SINGH : On conjee, Huzur.

PALTU KHAN : In that case put sand into it and if he leaves it show it to the *Bara Sab* on his round. Say the accused refuses food. Then we can flog him for hunger-strike.

MAHESH : You can do it without a pretext. You did it yesterday and the day before and the day before that—.

PALTU KHAN : And will do it again—d-m you— But not to day. Not enough time. (*Takes out some papers and turns them over.* GUMAN SINGH *moves quietly towards the wall behind* PALTU KHAN *and stands biting his lips,*

clenching his fists and trying to control the rage, which has been consuming him all this time.)

PALTU KHAN : *(picking up some papers and making an occasional note as he listens)* Here you are—Now tell me, when did your chief first give you orders to start this killing and burning ?

MAHESH : No chief ever gave us any such orders. Nor did we start killing and burning. It was the police and the military who started and kept at it, long before any of us took courage from their example and lesson from their methods.

PALTA KHAN : *(wagging the whip on the table)* Keep to the point and don't make me use the magic wand oftner than you can help. Make a full confession and we'll have done with it. I've pressing matters on hand and I want to make it easy for you if you will be sensible.

MAHESH : But what more do you want to know ? I've told you the worst and without equivocation. We want to turn the British out of India. They have been a curse to

this land. They squeeze the poor, set brother against brother, corrupt the

PALTU KHAN : Cut that out. Every official knows that. Every Englishman, who is not a congenital idiot, knows within ten days of landing, how his race is detested in India. What the Government want to know is your plan...your blue print of this uprising. Where are the other members of the gang which calls itself the Directorate or something ?

MAHESH : Some where in India. Military secret.

PALTU KHAN : Who supplies you with funds ?

Where do you get all the money from ?

MAHESH : Why should we tell you ?

PALTU KHAN : Hasn't your Party planned to kill the Viceroy and the Governors ?

MAHESH : The Party is not fond of killing for killing's sake. In fact, not being used to it like you, we funk killing more than getting killed. But the *Quran* and *Gita* declare that we must not shirk killing the tyrant and that cowards go to hell. When somebody burns a Pathan's home or carries off a Rajput's wife what does the Pathan

or the Rajput do? He kills. (*Here GUMAN SINGH picks up a heavy spanner that is lying among other tools on the shelf close to him and keeps his hand behind his back and shows signs of further excitement.*) What are your V.C's given for?—Killing. Killing the enemy. Killing at great risk.

PALTU KHAN: Who is your enemy?

MAHESH: The man or the power that robs us of the fruit of our labour; that undermines our strength by sowing seeds of treachery and fratricide; that spreads terror by torture and degradation by bribery; that fosters our ignorance and selfishness; that thrives on brute force, cunningly disguised as Law and Order; that ...

PALTU KHAN That's enough. Take the rest as read. Come to the point: murdering the Viceroy and the Governors.

MAHESH: The Viceroy and the Governors are just *munshis*, head-clerks and tax collectors of their paymasters in London. We would merely put them in a labour camp and make them work...unless, of course, it was proved that some of them made

private fortunes out of the groans and tears and hunger-pangs of the millions they ruled.

PALTU KHAN : And what would you do in that case—you who are so mighty ?

MAHESH : Give them a public hanging at their respective capitals. That's what we would do. But our chief task will be to deal with our own Indians—Hindus, Muslims and the rest, high and low. It is not the Viceroy's hands that set fire to our huts or shoot us or whip us. It's not the Governor's tongue that betrays our shelters or utters false evidence against us. The spy, the constable, the public prosecutor, the hired magistrate, the war-fund racketeer, the "confession" extractor, all those who hunt us, torture us, sell us—are our own people, flesh of our flesh, bone of our bones. It is these who offend against us, against themselves, against truth, against humanity. It is these we must cast out, amputate like a gangrenous limb. These are the enemies within our gates—the original Fifth Columnist. Once we end them or mend them, the insolent foreigner and his brood

of blood-suckers will vanish like a bad dream.

PALTU KHAN : Does it ever strike you that the police you would kill off are doing their duty against heavy odds—that being faithful to those one serves, being true to one's salt, is no crime ?

MAHESH : But is it you who eat the foreigner's salt or he who eats yours ?

PALTU KHAN : That's all quibbling and platform talk. We are realists. Seeing is believing. We see the foreigners paying us and we do their bidding.

MAHESH : Without thinking for a moment whether the bidding is just or unjust ?

PALTU KHAN : That is the essence of service. Obey the *Bara Sab*.

MAHESH : Suppose your *Bara Sab* orders you to sell him your wife ? What would you do ?

PALTU KHAN : (*hurling a heavy paper weight at MAHESH in fury and hitting him on the forehead and cutting it open*) This is what I would do, you foul-mouthed dog... you... son of a.....

GUMAN SINGH : And I too... (*brings down the*

spanner with full force on PALTU KHAN'S head from behind and stuns him.) You double-crossing bastard you black hearted pig..... you ugly fiend...you scoundrel..... *(delivering a blow at each epithet.)* I told you I was going to marry GIRJA—did I ? I applied for leave—did I ? I'm in league with counterfeiters—am I ? When you couldn't buy my girl you would steal her—would you ? You son of a bitch—*(delivers a last blow, notices that PALTU KHAN has sagged ominously in his chair—motionless and bleeding—throws away the spanner and makes for the door.)*

MAHESH : I say, you are not going to leave me here—are you ?

GUMAN SINGH : *(waking up to MAHESH'S presence)* My God! you—you have been a witness to to all this ! I clean forgot...well I must finish you too *(approaches him with undecisive steps.)*

MAHESH : That's what I would like myself..... I'm not enamoured of life in police custody. I would, however, prefer a bullet to a spanner, if it's all the same to you. There

is a revolver in his pocket (*pointing to*
PALTU KHAN.)

GUMAN SINGH: No...no. That wont do. The shot would be heard. It must be the spanner. Where's the d-m thing? (*looking about without moving.*)

MAHESH: Well, just as you like. Only make it quick, will you?

GUMAN SINGH: But then...I'll have two bodies to account for, instead of one...

MAHESH: That's true. It *would* be awkward, wouldn't it? You will be in a worse fix. Suppose you set me free and let me vanish. Then you could say I did it while you had left the room to fetch some papers...Say the bracelets were removed because the Inspector relented, as I agreed to write a good confession.

GUMAN SINGH: That's an idea...certainly, but but why let you go? I'll untie you—yes, but keep the hand-cuffs, raise alarm and say I re-captured you, after you did the deed.

MAHESH: But in that case I might squeal. I'm bound to give away your show.

GUMAN SINGH : They wont believe you.

MAHESH : Perhaps they wont—but perhaps they will. On the contrary, if I bolt, my guilt is as good as proved.

GUMAN SINGH : Wait a moment. Let me think... What about my reward ? I lose it if you get away, don't I ?

MAHESH : My dear man, what good is a reward, when you are hanged for murder ? Besides, you captured me once and the reward is yours. If PALTU KHAN bungles and I run away it's not your fault.

GUMAN SINGH : Yes, that's true. But—but if I let you go you will squeal, all the same.

MAHESH : Look here, you know the charges against me. Once escaped, am I likely to go anywhere near the police ? Would I risk my neck just for the pleasure of seeing you hanged ? And as you say, they wont believe me.

GUMAN SINGH : Perhaps you are right... No time to hesitate....d-m you, I'll do it. Here you are. (*Unties him from the ring and removes handcuffs.*) Now be quick and get out. (*Thrusting a file of papers in his*

hands) carry this under your arm. You can pass for a C. I. D. in mufti or an informer or a Communist stooge. Your make up suits all right. Go through the bath-room and jump out of the window. God blast you !

MAHESH : O. K. Give me fifteen minutes before you raise alarm, mind you.

(As he moves towards the bath-room the curtain falls.)

Act IV.

NEW CHARACTERS :

HAMID : *Asstt. Deputy Superintendent of police. A young man of nearly 32, a graduate from Lucknow and a scion of a cultured and patriotic family. In his college days he has fraternised with youths of different provinces and made friends among different communities.*

SCENE : *The same evening, 6 p. m. in USHA'S study.*

It is a snugly furnished, tastefully decorated room, at present in obvious disorder. It is situated in the quietest wing of the house and has two windows giving on the garden and hedge; a door communicating with the corner of the verandah and another with the bed-room.

USHA is busy ransacking the writing table which stands between the two windows. Her brother's photo in a metal frame, Kashmir table lamp, de-luxe writing set, stylish time-piece, bowl of

roses—all these are pushed aside to make room for her attache case and the articles she is hurriedly stuffing into it. There is a small stool to the right of the table.

Opposite the table is the mantelpiece, with a well-stocked book-case on each side. On the mantelpiece stands an unfinished clay statue of Saraswati on peacock, a flower-vase and a few antiques of art in ivory, sandalwood and bronze.

Along the wall to the right of the table, separating the study from the bed-room, are two comfortable chairs, with a teapoy between them.

A chest of drawers stands across the corner, formed by this wall with the one facing the table and partly covers the gap between the adjacent book-case and chair. The top of the chest of drawers also shows signs of hurried disarrangement. A violin and bow, silk saris, sandals, photo albums, thermos flask are all jumbled together.

Against the wall to the left of the table, and on each side of the door leading to the front verandah, are bigger book-cases.

On each wall hangs a solitary but exquisite painting. The floor is covered with a light

coloured carpet.

While USHA is busy packing her attache-case, the maid enters with a tray loaded with tea, fruits and nashta. She puts it down on the stool near the table.

MAID : What's it now, Didi ? Why this eleventh hour change ?

USHA : God knows what's behind it, BINO. At 4 o'clock father told us the lie about Uncle being ill and all the rest of it. That we had expected. I packed my suit case and the bearer packed father's. Petrol was stored and the car was ready. Then suddenly father rushes off to the *Kotwali* saying that an Inspector has been murdered. Is this a new trap ?

MAID : The murder, at any rate, is a fact, Didi. Our Orderly has seen the body.

USHA : Father now telephones that he will not be in for 3 or 4 hours and that the trip is off till tomorrow. But why should we wait for him ? Why should we not make good our escape straight away ? There is nothing to prevent us from reaching Uncle all the same. He will be waiting at

Mirzapur. This is our best chance...But then what about a car ?.....There's the real difficulty.

MAID : Shall I try for my brother-in-law's taxi ? His boss often lets him accept distant fares.

USHA : Oh, BINO ! If only that could be arranged ! Do go and try. Don't spare money, and do be quick.

MAID : Yes, I will—but you must take a heavy *nashta*, Didi, and keep ready. If we get a taxi, there will be a long journey ahead.

USHA : How can I eat, BINO, when I feel like a hunted creature ? But I'll have a cup of tea to please you. Take this purse and don't be long. And a taxi at any price, remember.

MAID : Yes, Didi. (*Exit Maid.*)

USHA makes herself a cup of tea and as she finishes drinking it and is eating some fruit MAHESH enters, jumping through the window behind and to her left. He is wearing the same clothes as in the last Act. The cut on his forehead is still bleeding.

His cap and face are blood stained.)

MAHESH : (*pointing the nozzle of his weapon at USHA*) If you cry out or call for help you are dead. Keep still and not a hair of your head will be hurt....-Good Heavens ! What rotten luck ! I thought the room was empty.

USHA : What do you want ? If you are after jewelry you are wasting your time. There are no valuables here.

MAHESH : (*keeping her covered*) Do I look like a burgler ? Even a farm girl would not be so dense.

USHA : Isn't it enough that you threaten to kill me ? Must you also be rude ? What do you want ?

MAHESH : Nothing but your silence. I won't trouble you long.....Sorry to be a nuisance ... But can't help it . right of self-defence, of dodging persuit, of self preservation....

USHA : Oh, you are.....I mean, are you being persued—are you an absconder ?

MAHESH : Not a bad guess.

USHA : Now that I look again....MAHESH PRASAD of Azad League ! Am I right ?

MAHESH : Flattered, I'm sure. I hope I do justice to the police photographs.

USHA : The wits of the absconder who chooses a D. S. P.'s bungalow for shelter must be wool-gathering. Even a village yokel would show greater sense.

MAHESH : Heavens ! D. S. P.'s bungalow ? From the frying pan into the fire ! The bloodhounds were at my heels. I turned the corner and there was your hedge. How the deuce was I to suspect this was the lion's den ?

USHA : Put that revolver away. I'm not afraid of you. But it might go off by itself and give you away. Besides, I want to bind your wound. It's bleeding badly, don't you see ?

MAHESH : I say—what's that ? Is it a trap ? Do you mean it ? Or am I dreaming ? Or are you an angel ? Is it necessary to bother about the cut ? Any way, here is the weapon. I surrender it to you...can't do any less in common gratitude. (*Hands her what is only a piece of piping.*)

USHA : Good Gracious ! Just a hollow pipe !

MAHESH : Picked up beneath your window.

USHA : Are you satisfied at my humiliation ?

MAHESH : The joke is really on me. You called my bluff.

USHA : Now come and sit down in this chair.

(Points to the chair near the chest of drawers.)

I've a few things handy and I'll dress your cut in no time. *(He sits as indicated, takes off his cap and puts it on the teapoy. From the chest she takes out First Aid things, a bottle of Iodine, a bowl, cotton wool, bandage, etc., wipes the blood from his face and wound, throws the swabs into a saucer placed on the floor and ties up a neat bandage. They talk during the dressing.)*

USHA : Do keep steady—don't fidget. Does it hurt ?

MAHESH : N-o...not much. I say, I can't really believe I'm awake. You are awfully good, you know, to take all this trouble.

USHA : How ? Even Police Officer's daughters are human.

MAHESH : But this may bring disaster upon you, don't you see ?

USHA : Oh I shall look after myself, don't you

worry. I think you haven't had much to eat... perhaps for days. Here's some milk and fruits and things. Wait a moment. I'll clear this teapoy. (*Removes the dressing things to the top of the chest of drawers and picking up the tray from the stool near the table places it on the teapoy, partly covering his cap.*) Now attend to the inner man. Don't mind me. I'm going to bolt the outer door. (*Bolts the door communicating with the verandah.* MAHESH *helps himself to milk and fruits.*)

MAHESH : Ah, this *is* a dream and no mistake ...Food—and what is still more precious, sympathy !

USHA : While you are refreshing yourself, may I do a little preaching ? I may not get another chance, you know. Or will that be taking a mean advantage ?

MAHESH : Go ahead. You seem too much in earnest to want merely to get the better of me. But I hope you will be brief. Sermons are soporifics and I haven't slept for days and days.

USHA : I shall come straight to the point. Do

you think it nice to go about shooting and terrorising people ?

MAHESH : You think I do this sort of thing for fun, don't you ?

USHA : Of course you risk your life—and I know you believe you have to do it to free the country. But don't you think your cause would prosper better if your hands were not stained in blood ?

MAHESH : "Not stained in blood"—quite a poetic expression ! Raises a beautiful picture ! The *Luftwaffe* ace or the R.A.F. hero reduces women and children to a ghastly pulp. But his hands ?—Ah, as stainless as a babe's ! Not even the gloves bismear'd ! That's perhaps why his cause prospers better !

USHA : Don't try to be funny. You know what I mean.

MAHESH : In plain, why do we deviate from the rosy path of non-violence ?—Isn't that what you mean ?

USHA : Exactly.

MAHESH : Were we ever on it in reality ? Does such a path exist at all ? I mean, for

common mortals ? Or was it just another illusion to which we clung desperately in our impotence ?

USHA : I don't quite follow you. Are you being clever again ?

MAHESH : Well, I'll put it this way. Can a sailor, marooned on a wild island, reach the habitated continent without crossing water ?

USHA : Of course not.

MAHESH : Neither can a nation, kept in bondage by force of arms, ever regain freedom except through arms.

USHA : Doesn't a man, who calmly endures a brutal attack without resistance, set a nobler example ?

MAHESH : You mean spiritually ? Presenting the other cheek ? Sermon on the Mount idea ?

USHA : It comes to that, I suppose.

MAHESH : There you are taking me beyond my depth, young lady. You must forgive me if I refuse to follow you. I'm of the earth, earthy and content to crawl on the level of commonsense. I'm not qualified

for lofty flights.

USHA : That's only covering up your obstinacy. You have a closed mind. An intelligent person ought at least to aim high and not scoff at spiritual values.

MAHESH : I've no such irreverent intention, believe me. But how can I shut my eyes to facts ? I've seen many peasants bear the lash of the tyrant without resistance. But hatred was blazing forth from their eyes like sparks from a furnace. What would be the spiritual value of such non-violence ? Would you count impotent rage as moral triumph ?

USA : N-o, obviously not.

MAHESH : Again—take the reverse case. Police parties, in the midst of their orgies of rapine and murder, have, now and again, been suddenly mowed down, like ripe corn, by men who snarled and sprang like hungry tigers, who struck and slashed like raving lunatics,—but who normally would not hurt a fly. Would you condemn their violence ?

USHA : No, to be honest, I wouldn't.

MAHESH : Ah, that's just the point. Few of us who talk glibly about non-violence are honest. If your argument is expediency, it's a different matter. We have neither planes, nor mortars, nor tanks. Our token violence can be crushed in no time by the mightier violence of the tyrant. Don't we know how some of our villages have been bombed out of existence in Bihar and Bengal ? Expediency is of course a serious consideration. But it has to be judged afresh every time. So non-violence must not be allowed to pass for a creed. This dope of *Ahimsa* as Soul Force in politics has got to be stopped. It simply doesn't exist for you and me and millions like us.

USHA : But there are noble exceptions.

MAHESH : All honour to them certainly. But why not mind your own business and leave the Noble Exceptions to mind theirs? What good is aeronautics to the fish ? Because the eagle soars high should a kitten fling itself from the top of a sky-scraper and expect to scale the heavens ?

USHA : I see your point.

MAHESH : To me, righteous anger and verile resistance to tyranny have a place in man's growth. They add to a nation's stature. I'm talking of the world as it is and not of a future Utopia. To-day, for the common man, to talk of non-violence as a Spiritual Force is the cheapest hypocrisy, the basest *mithyachar*. While you pretend to rise to moral heights, your smouldering hatred and selfish dread only corrupt your soul. Psychologically it leaves you a fraud and a wreck. India needs to be released from the blight of these buried complexes. For, what is not healthy psychologically can never be healthy morally or spiritually.

USHA : I say, which is the pulpit and which the pew ? I thought I was to play the preacher and you the congregation. But you have—(*there is sharp knocking upon the outer door.*)

MAHESH : (*speaking low*) That brings me down from the clouds.

USHA : (*whispering*) Get behind the chest of drawers. Quick !

MAHESH : But look here... I hate to get you

into trouble. And any way, how long can this...

USHA : (*pushing him*) Don't waste time. Hide !
(MAHESH gets behind the chest of drawers.
USHA runs to the door and opens it. Asstt.
D. S. P. HAMID and a Sub-Inspector
greet her.)

HAMID : (*removing his hat, bowing and stepping in*) A thousand pardons, Miss MISRA ..
Sorry to intrude upon your privacy. Fact is a notorious political has escaped from custody less than half an hour ago. A search is on. A passerby saw some one get into this room or this wing. Naturally I thought...

USHA : But nobody could have got in here, Mr. HAMID. I've been in this room for over an hour... And there are no other windows on this side.

HAMID : You mean you've not left this room during this hour ?

USHA : Exactly.

HAMID : (*thoughtfully*) Then that settles it. It must be a mistake. I'm indeed very sorry. The passerby must have imagined it.

They often do on hearing of a chase. Well, in that case I have only to apologise and move on. Awfully sorry to have tresspassed. Your father is terribly upset at the headquarters.

USHA : Is it true, Mr. HAMID, that one of the jail officers is murdered ?

HAMID : Yes, our Chief Inspector has been done to death.

USHA : How frightful ! Will father be detained there long ?

HAMID : It will take him at least three hours, I should say. Poor Mr. MISRA. You see, this is a four-fold blow to him. The crime in the *Kotwali*, the victim his Chief Inspector, the culprit, at least one of the suspects—the man in custody,—and (*suddenly notices something and is excited.*) Hello... I say...hm... (*looks searchingly at USHA . Turns to the policeman.*) Look here, Sub-Inspector, you had better go on We've drawn blank here. Wait for instructions at the Clock Tower Thana. (*Sub-Inspector salutes and goes.* HAMID approaches USHA and says in a whisper)

Won't you trust me, Miss MISRA ? That passerby was after all not wrong, I find.

USHA : Trust you ? How do you mean ?

HAMID : (*walks past her and pulls out the blood-stained Gandhi cap, half protruding from beneath the tea-tray and presents it to USHA with a bow.*) You and your visitor should be more careful about such things, Miss MISRA.

USHA : Really, I do not understand you, Mr. HAMID.

HAMID : Come, Miss MISRA. Treat me as a friend. Just by chance and at the last minute this cap catches my eye. Then the blood-stained cotton and the First Aid kit. At last I wake up and notice two used tea-cups and faint foot prints on your clean carpet, between the window and the chair. In short, if you will pardon me :

USHA : (*forcing a laugh*) You read too many Sherlock Homes stories, Mr. HAMID. I'm really amused that a smart officer like you should be so easily.....

HAMID : Let me speak in confidence, Miss MISRA, knowing your sympathy and your

brother's sacrifice in this revolution. MAHESH may or may not be your friend... but he is mine,—at least my brother's. Captain AGAH and he were together at Cambridge and ..

MAHESH : (*comes out and discloses himself*)
Hello ! So you are AGAH'S brother ? Glad to meet you (*offers hand. HAMID gives it a warm shake.*) I'm in rare luck. First Miss MISRA takes compassion,—how can I ever repay her kindness—and now you arrive !

USHA : (*with a sigh of relief*) Thank God it turns out all right. I was choking with anxiety...Thought it was all up with Mr. MAHESH...Didn't imagine Mr. HAMID too would be in it.

MAHESH : It's like a ray of light in a dungeon. Good for the Police that there are some who redeem them. How is dear old AGAH ?

HAMID : Only three days ago he sent a special messenger, asking to make things easier for you.

MAHESH : Good old AGAH ! Though in the I. M. S. still a staunch member of our secret Party. And what about you, Brother

HAMID ?

HAMID : I've attached myself to one of your Infiltration Squads. In trying to capture the Military and the Police from within we've had some success but alas ! not much.

MAHESH : Time—Patience—Suffering, these alone will bring us success, my brother. And now what do we do, HAMID ? The chase must have cooled a bit. I think I must get away while the going is good.

HAMID : Look here, MAHESHJI, I've a plan. From now I'm on duty between here and Mirzapur. In fact, my job is to close the net round you in that part. My car will thus be the safest place for you. Why not come with me and leave the *Kotwali* far behind ?

USHA : That's a fine idea. You must get away at once, Mr. MAHESH.

MAHESH : By the way, what about the Inspector's murder ? While speaking to Miss MISRA, you put me down as only a suspect. What makes you doubtful ?

HAMID : PALTU KHAN upset GUMAN SINGH'S

ruse about you by recovering consciousness before dying. Also a Constable, peeping through a window-blind had by chance seen GUMAN SINGH setting you free. There was further evidence about a woman and an intrigue. Altogether GUMAN SINGH is in for a pretty bad time and no mistake.

MAHESH : Poor devil ! He set me free with a halter round my neck. How he battered PALTU KHAN from behind with a spanner... Awful sight ! I suppose PALTU KHAN deserved it. Well, if you think you can spirit me away... I'm ready. It's your headache. A few miles this side of Mirzapur will suit me. I'll pick up a contact thereabouts.

(Enter Maid, approaches USHA and whispers.)

MAID : It can't be done, Didi. My brother-in law is out and I tried everywhere. But no taxi can be had for such distance on any terms. It's too short a notice.

USHA : *(aloud)* Oh God ! What's to be done ? What shall I do ? I must escape. This will be the last chance. *(With sudden decision)* Mr. HAMID, will it be some time

before you start on your tour ?

HAMID : I've started already. This was just a digression.

USHA : Then can you give me too a lift ?

HAMID : Certainly, with pleasure. Where to ?

USHA : Oh, I won't take you out of your way. Say Mirzapur. That seems the Mecca for all three of us to-day.

HAMID : You are quite welcome. But... I don't quite understand.

USHA : You will—before long. (*to Maid*) BINO put my luggage and yours in HAMID SAB's car. Ask the Orderly to tell father that I left for Uncle's place as to-morrow might be too late. Say we are taking a taxi at the station.

MAID : Very well, Didi (*Exit.*)

USHA : Let's be off then. (*Picks up her attache case. MAHESH relieves her of it.*) Thank you—Oh wait a minute. (*Rushes to the chest of drawers, pulls out a coat and a hat and thrusts these on MAHESH.*) Give me the attache and wear these quickly. my brother's U. T. C. things... For Mr. HAMID's sake we must appear respectable.

MAHESH : Right you are. (*Wears the hat and pulls the coat on hurriedly.*)

HAMID : Are you...I mean...what's the great idea, Miss MISRA ? Won't Mr. MISRA be anxious ?

USHA : Oh, father will be all right. You needn't dig up a conscience so late in the day, Mr. HAMID. Since you are smuggling one absconder you might as well smuggle two. Fact is I'm in trouble and have decided to cut the painter....More I'll explain on the way.

HAMID : That's all right, Miss MISRA. That's enough for me. It's not every day that a fellow gets the chance of serving an illustrious patriot and relieving beauty in distress at one and the same stroke.

USHA : Let's hurry up then. You've a whole hundred miles before you for making pretty speeches. Mr. MAHESH, now you give the right touch to the expedition. Don't you think two absconders are better than one ? Do you mind my inviting myself to this ride ?

MAHESH : Mind, Miss MISRA ? Ah, if only the

world were not in such a mess, one would wish such a ride to last for ever. But... away with "IFS." And on with the march, Brother HAMID. There's a fresh attack to be launched against the enemy.

(As they move towards the door the curtain falls.)



